

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 211235Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1961

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 15234

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR US LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE/AMERICAN RELATIONS

SUMMARY: TAQLA THREATENS TO RESIGN UNLESS EITHER I ABSENT MYSELF FROM BEIRUT DURING FRANGIE'S DEC. 31 RECEPTION OR A BANAL LETTER IS RECEIVED FROM PRESIDENT FORD PRIOR TO THE RECEPTION. END SUMMARY.

1. AT 10:30 A.M. THIS MORNING (DEC. 21) FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA RECEIVED ME AT FOREIGN MINISTRY. I REPORTED TO HIM IN GENERAL TERMS REGARDING MY VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION OF SNIFFING INCIDENT. POINTED OUT UNDEFINED ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION HAD BEEN TAKEN REGARDING THOSE CONCERNED AND THAT INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN ISSUED MODIFYING PROCEDURES RELATING TO RECEPTION OF PROMINENT VISITORS TO NEW YORK.

2. TAQLA PLEASSED BUT THEN REVERTED TO QUESTION OF LETTER FROM PRESIDENT FORD. HE REFERRED TO HIS CONVERSATION WITH CHARGE HOUGHTON REPORTED EMBTEL 14827 AND PRESSED STRONGLY ON THIS POINT, INDICATING THAT LETTER NEED NOT RPT NOT CONTAIN ANY APOLOGY BUT MERELY INDICATE THAT OUR PRESIDENT AWARE OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY SECRETARY FOLLOWING NEW YORK INCIDENT. I TOLD TAQLA THAT I WOULD REPORT HIS VIEWS BUT THAT I DID NOT BELIEVE SUCH A LETTER WOULD BE FORTHCOMING. I POINTED OUT THAT SECRETARY HAD EXPRESSED HIS REGRETS AND THAT HE HAD ALSO INSTITUTED INVESTIGATION AND HAD INFORMED FOREIGN MINISTER OF ITS RESULTS. TAQLA THEN SAID HE FULLY APPRECIATED EVERYTHING THAT HAD BEEN DONE AND

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THAT IF THIS WERE A "NORMAL" SITUATION, HE CERTAINLY WOULD NOT

DREAM OF REQUESTING ANYTHING MORE AND HE WOULD CONSIDER THE MATTER CLOSED. HE THEN SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS NOT A "NORMAL" SITUATION, IN VIEW OF "A PERSONALITY" INVOLVED, AND THE MAGNITUDE THIS INCIDENT HAD ASSUMED IN "THE INDIVIDUAL'S" MIND AND IN THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE. THE PRESS HAD HAD A FIELD DAY AND IT HAD ONLY BEEN WITH THE GREATEST OF DIFFICULTY THAT HE, TAQLA, HAD BEEN ABLE TO REDUCE ITS POLITICAL IMPACT ON THE INTERNAL LEBANESE SCENE AND TO MODERATE PRESS TREATMENT OF VARIOUS AND SUNDRY POLITICIANS ON THIS SUBJECT. TAQLA UNDERSTOOD THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT FORD COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO APOLOGIZE BUT IF HE COULD JUST TAKE NOTE OF WHAT THE SECRETARY HAD DONE, THIS WOULD SETTLE THE MATTER ONCE AND FOREVER.

3. TAQLA THEN MENTIONED THE FACT THAT DCM HOUGHTON WOULD BE MOST CORDIALLY WELCOMED AT PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION DEC. 31 (LEBANESE "EVACUATION DAY COMMEMORATING THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS IN 1945). HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION OF OUR UNDERSTANDING AND ASSURED ME THAT THIS WOULD LEAD TO AN EXTREMELY EARLY SOLUTION OF "THE PROBLEM" I.E., FRANGIE WOULD RECEIVE ME BY JAN 15. I TOLD TAQLA THAT I THOUGHT THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO QUESTION OF HOUGHTON REPRESENTING US AT THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION. HE THEN SAID HE HAD UNDERSTOOD THIS HAD BEEN AGREED TO BETWEEN HIM AND HOUGHTON AND BETWEEN KABBANI AND ME. I TOLD HIM THAT QUITE TO THE CONTRARY, KABBANI AND I HAD ABSOLUTELY NO UNDERSTANDING ON THIS MATTER AND THAT I HAD MADE NO RPT NO SUCH COMMITMENT. I WOULD DISCUSS THIS MATTER WITH HOUGHTON IMMEDIATELY UPON MY RETURN TO MY OFFICE, BUT I WAS QUITE SURE HE HAD MADE NO COMMITMENT. (HOUGHTON NOTES HE NEVER TOLD TAQLA WHAT I WOULD DO ON DEC 31. HE INDICATED TO KHALIL HADDAD THAT HE WOULD INFORM ME OF THIS POSSIBILITY BUT COULD NOT COMMIT ME ON WHAT WOULD BE DONE.) I TOLD TAQLA THAT I WOULD REPORT WHAT HE HAD TOLD ME BUT THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT THE INSTRUCTIONS RE THE NOV. 22 RECEPTION STILL STOOD -- I.E., EITHER THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT IS REPRESENTED BY ITS AMBASSADOR OR ELSE BY NO ONE.

4. TAQLA WAS VISIBLY MOST UPSET AND DISTRESSED. HE SAID THAT IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT I WOULD TACTFULLY ABSENT MYSELF FROM LEBANON DURING THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION AND THAT THE CHARGE WOULD REPRESENT THIS MISSION. HE CONTINUED THAT IF NO RPT NO AMERICANS WERE PRESENT AT THE RECEPTION, THIS WOULD REOPEN

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THE ENTIRE QUESTION IN LEBANESE POLITICAL CIRCLES AND IN THE PRESS. IN VIEW OF EVERYTHING HE HAS DONE SO FAR IN AN EFFORT TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM, HIS ONLY RECOURSE WOULD BE TO RESIGN AS FOREIGN MINISTER AND LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY WOULD. WHILE HE WAS OBVIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY UPSET, I AM CONVINCED THIS IS NO IDLE THREAT. IN TAQLA'S OWN MIND, HE IS CONVINCED HE HAS DONE HIS UTMOST AND IT IS A FACT THAT THIS WHOLE AFFAIR HAS CAUSED HIM NOT ONLY PERSONAL ANGUISH BUT ALSO HAS RESULTED IN CRITICISM OF HIM

NOT ONLY IN THE PRESS BUT BY FRIENDS. WHILE TAQLA HAS NO POLITICAL AMBITION HE NEVERTHELESS IS A PROUD MAN WHO BELIEVES HE IS SERVING AS FOREIGN MINISTER ONLY FOR PATRIOTIC REASONS AND IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE CONDUCT OF HIS COUNTRY'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

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5. IT IS IN NO ONE'S(EXCEPT OUR ENEMIES') INTEREST TO HAVE THIS SITUATION CONTINUE. THE BASE OF THE PROBLEM IS STILL THE SAME--I.E., A STUBBORN, PROUD, UNSOPHISTICATED MOUNTAINEER WHO HAPPENS TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE LEBANON. HE HAS DEFINITELY SUFFERED POLITICALLY FROM HIS STUBBORNESS ON THIS MATTER, BUT HE IS STILL THE PRESIDENT AND HAS THE POWER TO DECIDE WHO WILL ENTER HIS HOME. WHILE THOUGHTFUL LEBANESE CRITICIZE THEIR PRESIDENT'S CONDUCT, THEY ALSO APPRECIATE AND UNDERSTAND WHAT OUR GOVERNMENT HAS DONE IN AN EFFORT TO CONCLUDE AMICABLY THIS TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT.

6. THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY TWO ALTERNATIVES: EITHER PRESIDENT FORD IN A BRIEF LETTER, TO BE DELIVERED BY ME AT DEC. 31 RECEPTION, INDICATE HIS AWARENESS OF WHAT THE SECRETARY HAS DONE TO ASSUAGE FRANGIE'S SENSIBILITIES OR I ABSENT MYSELF FROM LEBANON DURING THE BRIEF PERIOD OF THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION. THERE IS, OF COURSE, A THIRD POSSIBILITY--I.E., THAT WE STAND BY OUR GUNS AND THAT THERE BE NO LETTER AND NO AMERICAN AT THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION. I TRUST THAT THIS THIRD POSSIBILITY WILL BE REJECTED SUMMARILY FOR IT WOULD ONLY RESULT IN CONTINUED UNPLEASANTNESS NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF BASIC US/LEBANESE RELATIONS. IT IS DISTASTEFUL TO ACQUIESCE TO THE DEMANDS OF THE FIERCE PRIDE OF A LEADER OF A FRIENDLY STATE. I BELIEVE HOWEVER

THAT WE ARE GREAT ENOUGH TO DO SO AND WOULD COME OUT EVEN GREATER
IN THE LONG RUN.

7. (A) THE CONS OF EITHER ALTERNATIVES 1 OR 2 ARE THAT WE
WOULD ACQUIESCE TO FRANGIE'S PRIDE. ALSO SOME LEFTIST

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ELEMENTS HERE WOULD BRIEFLY CROW.

7. (B) THE PROS ARE THAT WE WOULD BRING A SPEEDY CONCLUSION TO
THIS RIDICULOUS MATTER, OUR COUNTRY WOULD BE GREATER FOR IT IN
THE EYES OF THE VAST MAJORITY OF THOUGHTFUL LEBANESE, AND WE
WOULD KEEP AS FOREIGN MINISTER ONE OF LEBANON'S MOST PRO-
AMERICAN AND MOST QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS.

8. AS FOR PREFERENCE BETWEEN ALTERNATIVES 1 OR 2, I
BELIEVE THE EASIEST WOULD BE FOR ME TO CONSULT WITH AMBASSADOR
MURPHY IN DAMASCUS DURING THE TIME OF THE PRESIDENT'S
RECEPTION--I.E., BE ABSENT FROM LEBANON FOR ABOUT EIGHT HOURS.
THIS WILL, OF COURSE, RESULT IN SOME COMMENT BUT INFINITELY
LESS THAN HAVING NO AMERICAN AT THE RECEPTION AND TAQLA'S
RESIGNING.

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